

Farm Talk

Jerry Webb

One of the important changes taking place in rural America these days has to do with women and the part they play in the farm business.

Traditionally, farming has been a man's game with the farm wife reaping only survivor's benefits. The usual farm wife of a decade or two ago spent most of her time around the farm home doing the usual household chores, perhaps tending the garden, and helping her husband by running to town for parts and supplies or maybe driving a tractor during the very busy harvesting season. But it was still his farm. He made the decisions, paid the bills, and otherwise operated the farm while his wife handled the family affairs.

Women are waking up these days to the realization that such an arrangement is not all that satisfying and it also has some serious legal implications. For instance, a wife who can't prove that she's made any financial contribution to the business or drawn any salary from it, has trouble convincing Uncle Sam that she deserves more than the usual survivor's benefits.

Farm women are also discovering that they can now go to work and never leave the farm. There are important jobs they can do besides feeding a few chickens and taking care of the book work.

Many of them are realizing they would rather work on the farm with their

mate than go off to some paid city job. And so enterprises are being added, farm structures reorganized to give women financially rewarding parts of the overall farm business.

The Department of Agriculture is launching a study to find out just what is happening with farm women. It's called "The Farm Women's Project" and it's headed by Carol Forbes, a lawyer in the Department of Agriculture who formerly served as legal counsel to the House Agriculture Subcommittee on dairy and poultry.

She also owns a farm in Alaska. A random sampling of some 4100 farm homes is taking place this Spring with the National Opinion Research Center of Chicago handling the details.

Forbes says farm women work as hard as farm men to keep the business functioning. And she thinks the government, including the Department of Agriculture, have pretty much ignored the wife's feelings, attitudes and needs.

Here are some questions that will be asked:

Do the voting requirements for commodity referenda discriminate against farm women?

Are farm women treated without prejudice when they apply for Farmers Home Administration loans?

Is there adequate representation of women on USDA's various national and local advisory committees?

Are there federal or state

Berks Goatherders to hold picnic

FLEETWOOD — The April meeting of Berks Goatherders was held at the home of Stauffer and Barbara Reifsneider, R4 Fleetwood.

Approximately 20 families were in attendance. These represented the Kids with Kids 4-H club and the adult

club. The program was a presentation of information relating to udder health and a milking demonstration given by Barbara Reifsneider. Those 4-H children and adults who are raising their first doe kids had an opportunity to learn proper

milking technique.

The next meeting will be held Saturday, May 17 at 10:30 a.m. at Triple Creek Farm operated by Steve and Claire Dav.

The program for the May meeting will be Fitting and

Showing and will be followed by a picnic lunch and a mock goat show in the afternoon.

Anyone interested in joining Berks Goatherders may do so by sending a check for \$5 payable to Berks Goatherders. Mail membership payment to Barbara Reifsneider, R4042, Fleetwood, PA 19522.

laws or any USDA regulations that prevent women from becoming involved in USDA programs and services?

Since this is a random sampling, only a few thousand women out of a few million will be contacted. But others can still make their feeling known by writing to Forbes, who is director, Farm Women's Project, Room 1543, South Building, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

Forbes feels strongly that women's attitudes need to be worked into the policymaking apparatus, and once the surveys are completed she will make recommendations to the secretary about possible administrative changes and legislative action.

A lot of farm women aren't waiting for that report to make their feelings known. More and more they're attending and speaking up at farm gatherings. And some of them are there as more than farm wives. They are there as women farmers.

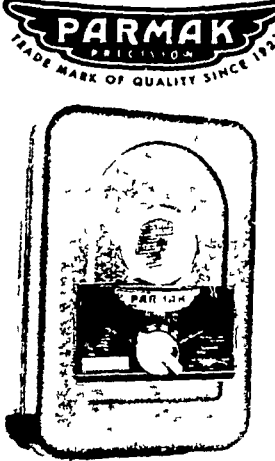
The Census Bureau identified 133,000 farm women in 1977 who are classed as independent farm owner operators. And you can bet that figure will continue to grow. Meanwhile, many other women who used to be classed as farm wives are taking on new status as they become involved in the actual operation of the farm business.

There isn't much work on the modern farm that can't be done equally well by men and women. It will take time to change attitudes, but it is happening.

Women are gaining wide acceptance as hired farm workers, and wives seem to be making headway as legal and participating partners in farming units. And what's wrong with that? Why should a woman who lives on a farm have to go to town to find a job? And why should a farmer pay wages to a hired man while his wife waits anxiously for his call for help?

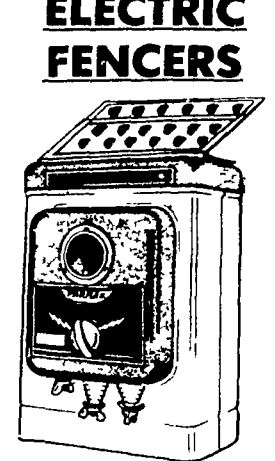
Liberated and employable women are finding their place in all phases of society. There's no doubt about that. The backbreaking work that excluded women in the past is pretty much gone from farming.

Only the tradition remains and that is rapidly disappearing.



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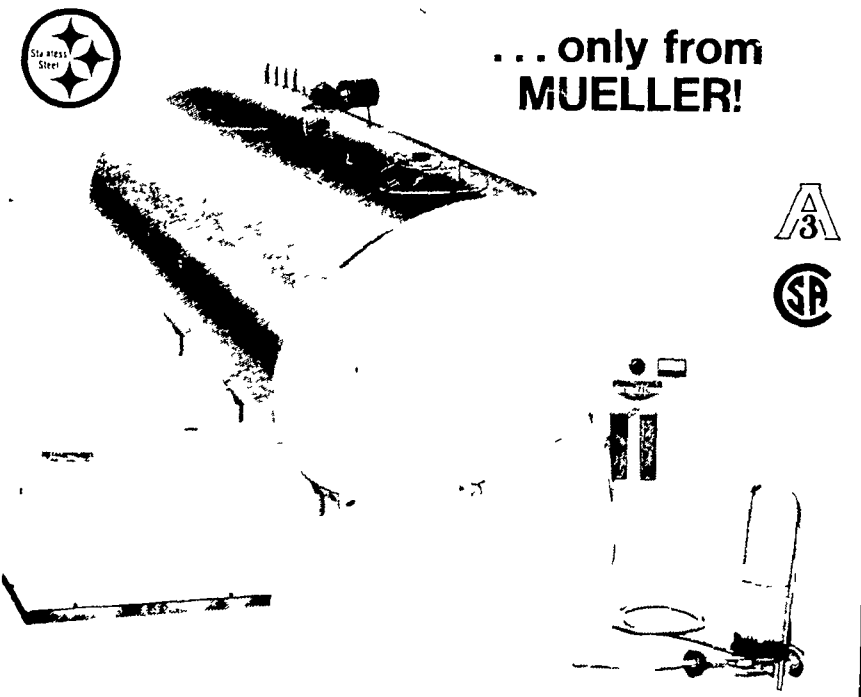
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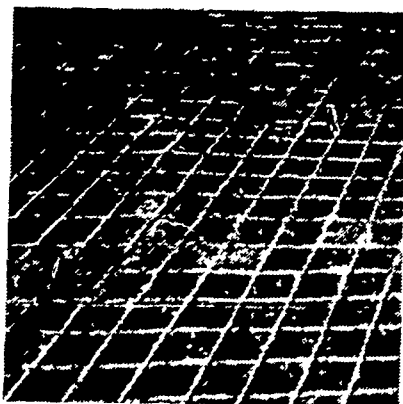
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